

# WESTGARTH PRIMARY SCHOOL LANGUAGES WORKING PARTY

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCHOOL COUNCIL AND PRINCIPAL

In August 2013, the Westgarth Primary School Languages Working Party (LWP) was established to provide strategic advice and leadership to ensure that there has been a comprehensive review of current Languages education at Westgarth Primary School (WPS), with a view to developing a new Languages Education Policy if appropriate.

As laid out by the LWP's Terms of Reference, the LWP has thoroughly explored options for Languages Education and the Languages Learning Model by considering DEECD policy statements, consulting extensively with the school community, and by researching current trends in Languages education both nationally and locally.

This document's aim is to set out recommendations to the School Council and Principal regarding the Language and Languages Learning Model to be offered at WPS, identifying:

- The reasons the recommended Language/s is to be preferred;
- The aim of the Languages Education, eg language acquisition, language proficiency, language awareness, cultural awareness;
- The type of Language/s Learning Model, eg Bi-Lingual Program, Mother Tongue Maintenance, Integration of language with other learning areas, etc; and
- How the Language/s Learning Model can be effectively delivered and any associated feasibility issues.

### RECOMMENDATION 1

#### **Change the current Languages program at WPS.**

*Reasons:* The current program of 50 minutes per week in Greek taught as a separate subject is not supported by the parent community. The LWP believes the current program has not delivered adequate learning outcomes for students for the following reasons:

- The first parent survey<sup>1</sup> results showed that the current language program rated poorly in the areas of teaching the ability to understand, speak, read or write a second language;
- Parent community satisfaction with the current program, as determined in both surveys,<sup>2</sup> was low;
- Research highlights that 50 minutes per week is an insufficient time allocation to achieve good learning outcomes;<sup>3</sup>
- DEECD guidelines stipulate that the performance outcomes from language learning is much broader than cultural / language awareness.<sup>4</sup>

*Operational considerations:* Staffing implications will need to be considered.

*Timing:* At the end of Term 4, 2014

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<sup>1</sup>[http://wgps.vic.edu.au/app/webroot/uploaded\\_files/media/lwp\\_results\\_from\\_the\\_school\\_community\\_survey.pdf](http://wgps.vic.edu.au/app/webroot/uploaded_files/media/lwp_results_from_the_school_community_survey.pdf) - page 3

<sup>2</sup> [http://wgps.vic.edu.au/uploaded\\_files/media/lwp\\_second\\_survey\\_results\\_final.pdf](http://wgps.vic.edu.au/uploaded_files/media/lwp_second_survey_results_final.pdf) - page 3

<sup>3</sup> [http://wgps.vic.edu.au/app/webroot/uploaded\\_files/media/background\\_paper\\_1.pdf](http://wgps.vic.edu.au/app/webroot/uploaded_files/media/background_paper_1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/languagesvisionplan.pdf>

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### Language Choice: Replace Greek with Spanish across all year levels.

*Reasons:* The responses from the parent community in two surveys conducted by the LWP (with a 39% and 51% survey response rate respectively) indicated that the parent community prefers Mandarin, followed by Spanish (but note Spanish was preferred for both CLIL and Bilingual Education, while Mandarin was preferred for Language taught as a separate subject). Greek was the sixth (or least) most preferred language across all models.

The LWP recommends Spanish because:<sup>5</sup>

- It ranked highly as a preferred language in both school community surveys;
- It ranked number one for preferred language in a CLIL or Bilingual model;
- It is a language of global importance, often cited as the second most spoken in the world, with 500 million speakers across the world;
- It uses the same alphabet as English, which will allow for greater parental and staff involvement in languages learning (parent feedback indicated a frustration with their inability to help and get involved with their child's learning of a language that uses a different alphabet);
- As a Romance language, Spanish shares similarities with other Romance languages, including French and Italian, and may therefore be more transferable to other languages which are taught at feeder high schools;
- Some current WPS staff members have indicated that they speak a bit of Spanish which may mean easier integration into the daily school routine;
- It is one of the 11 languages in the Australian Curriculum: Languages;
- According to the President of the Victorian Association of Teachers of Spanish, there is good teacher availability;
- The Consulate General of Spain in Melbourne has a Spanish Education Office, which may be able to provide WPS with support, similar to the current arrangement with the Greek Consulate;
- There is enthusiastic support from the President of the Victorian Association of Teachers of Spanish;<sup>6</sup>

The LWP recommends Spanish over Mandarin because:

- Mandarin is represented through Chinese characters rather than the Roman alphabet, and even with the Pinyin system of Romanisation, this makes it more difficult for parents and staff to engage with the children's languages learning, which was cited as a cause of frustration for parents in the 2013 WPS Languages survey;
- It may be harder to integrate Mandarin into other learning areas if the CLIL model is adopted, given the combined complexities of (a) Mandarin using a non-Roman language alphabet; and (b) Mandarin being a tonal language;
- As a tonal language which uses a non-Roman language alphabet, it is the opinion of the WPS Languages Working Party that Mandarin is a more difficult language in which to achieve proficiency for primary school-aged students whose primary language is English.

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<sup>5</sup> For further information, see:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/languages/whylearnspanish.pdf> and <http://consultation.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Static/docs/Languages/F-10%20Spanish%20-%20Draft%20curriculum%20-%20May%202013.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://vatsteachersofspanish.com>

*Other considerations:* WPS will lose the in-kind support of the Greek Consulate, which provides a volunteer to work with native Greek speakers during the week. In terms of pathways, the local secondary schools do not presently offer Spanish, however, the LWP notes that research suggests the skills learnt in primary school would be transferable in secondary school. Additionally, responses to the 2013 WPS Languages survey also indicated that the parent community ranked 'The ability to learn a language' as a more important consideration than 'Future Education/Career Pathways'. For both of these reasons the LWP does not consider this a determinative factor.

*Timing:* Start of Term 1, 2015

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**Adopt a new languages learning model that combines Language taught as a separate subject and Content & Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to deliver the language program at WPS.**

*Reasons:* The first survey results reveal that the parent community considers 'the ability to learn a language other than English' as the most important outcome for a languages program, suggesting the aim of the program should be language proficiency. The research suggests CLIL, and/or Language taught as a separate subject in the target language, are important factors in language acquisition. The second survey results demonstrate there is a strong interest in both Languages taught as a separate subject model and the CLIL model. The LWP recognises that the success of a program depends on strong support of the entire school community and believes a hybrid approach reflects the needs of the school community.

*Operational considerations:* The LWP considers that qualified language teacher(s) should be recruited to begin delivering the language program in 2015. Staff feedback identified the need for a high level of communication and co-ordination between classroom teachers and language specialists to ensure that planning and delivery of teaching and learning is coherent and consistent. The LWP considers this to be an important point and favours an approach which sees language staff working closely with existing staff to design the program and agree upon some of the fundamentals of Languages education at WPS (eg the degree to which instruction will be delivered in only the target language and the degree to which Languages instruction will be supplemented using tools such as gesturing and ICT resources). In the context of introducing a new program, it is important to have processes in place to measure success in achieving the aim of the program, for example by ensuring assessment tools are used so that data collection occurs from the outset. Regular feedback to the school community through student reports and presenting more general data on learning outcomes for students would assist in maintaining the school community's support for the language program. Based on information acquired through the second survey and research into programs offered by other schools, the LWP considers the areas of curriculum with which the language learning may be integrated are: Art, Inquiry / Discovery, Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden, Literacy, and Music. It is noted that the forthcoming Strategic Plan may introduce variations to programs and activities that are offered at WPS which should be considered as potential areas for integration under the CLIL aspect of the model.

*Timing:* Start of Term 1, 2015

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

**Increase the time dedicated to the language program to a minimum of 100 minutes per week.**

*Reasons:* The LWP recommends an initial increase of time allocation to 100 minutes per week on the basis that it is in the best interests of the students to offer a high quality program and a significant time allocation is required for this. It will make languages education a more enriching experience for students. In addition, utilising the CLIL model will reduce the impact on other areas of curriculum. It is noted that 150 minutes per week accords with the DEECD guidelines and the research. The option of offering 150 minutes per week should be revisited in the future.

*Operational considerations:* The option of combining Language taught as a separate subject and CLIL gives greater flexibility and will make the 100 minutes per week target more achievable.

*Timing:* Start of Term 1, 2015

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

**Create and use partnerships, initiatives and complementary practices and activities to enhance the language education at WPS.**

*Reasons:* The second survey results indicated strong support for partnerships with community-based organisations, other local schools, alliances with schools overseas as well as the following initiatives: ICT resources to support the child's languages learning; initiatives that celebrate of the culture and heritage of the language being taught; and extra-curricular languages courses, outside of school hours. The LWP also considers the following practices and activities could be beneficial to student learning outcomes in the area of language: musicals in Spanish; simple homework tasks (eg 100 word lists) to enhance learning; supporting (via website and newsletter) parents and carers to support their child's language learning; announcements over the PA system opening with a greeting in Spanish; parts of every morning and weekly assembly conducted in the language; parts of the newsletter in the language; classroom and school signs in English and Spanish; music before the bell to be songs in Spanish; presence of the language and culture at school community events and so on.

*Operational considerations:* School Council would support the establishment of a Languages committee comprising parents and Spanish/Central/South American community representatives to support staff in the development of partnerships, initiatives and complementary practices and activities within the community.

*Timing:* Start of Term 1, 2015

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

**Specify the new language program as a Key Improvement Strategy (KIS) within the forthcoming WPS Strategic Plan.**

*Reasons:* WPS should make a genuine commitment to languages education by specifying the new Languages Learning Program as a KIS. The LWP believes it is in the best interests of the students that

if a change is to be made, the resultant language program must become a school priority and focus for the next four years.

*Operational considerations:* To support the school to achieve its targets, Principal and Languages Teacher Performance and Development plans should be clearly attached to the Strategic Plan's identified Achievement goals of the language program.

*Timing:* Term 4, 2014

## **RECOMMENDATION 7**

**School Council ensures the language program is regularly evaluated and then in 2018 conducts a review of the language program and the time allocation after four years of operation.**

*Reasons:* The LWP considers there should be regular reporting to School Council on the ongoing implementation of the language program in accordance with the appropriate School Council processes. The timing of the review should be aligned with the forthcoming WPS Strategic Plan which spans 2015-2018. These measures serve to ensure continual improvement and check that the program is being delivered in an engaging and effective manner, with good learning outcomes for students, language learning pedagogy and curriculum, and meaningful assessment and reporting.

*Operational considerations:* These measures would be likely to follow from Recommendation 6 being adopted, for example, inclusion in the Strategic Plan means the program will be assessed on an annual basis, at a minimum, as part of the Annual Implementation Plan process.

*Timing:* Term 3, 2015

**Prepared by the Languages Working Party  
Dated 28 August 2014**